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Which Gospel? The Militarization of Sacred Texts in Israel's Genocide in Gaza

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Abstract

Sacred texts have frequently been used to legitimize the oppression and extermination of native peoples. This article argues that Christian and Jewish Zionism, being the ideology of settler-colonialism of Palestine, is genocidal. It showcases the ways sacred texts have been militarized to justify the Zionist settler-colonialism in its genocidal war against the Palestinians. Further, the Israeli military has deployed an Artificial Intelligence military system called 'the Gospel'. This article poses the question: Which 'gospel' would Palestinians think of when they hear this word – that of the Kingdom or of genocide? Applying an empire criticism approach, the article shows the concept carries several connotations – imperial and counter-imperial. The earlier is the imperial 'Gospel' of genocide, the latter is the gospel of the kingdom, which is counter-imperial. The church, as an agent of the gospel of kingdom, has to be prophetic in the face of oppression.

Keywords

Palestine – settler-colonialism – empire studies – Bible – kingdom of God – Zionism – Christian Zionism

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1 Introduction

The news of the Israeli war on Gaza has dominated public spaces for several months. The events have attracted the attention of media outlets, social media, and academic institutions and organizations. Even theologians and scholars moved with urgency to declare their condemnation of the attacks and support of Israel claim of 'self-defence'. The prestigious Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) published a statement on 16th October condemning the horrific attacks on 7th October 2023. Yet, it did not criticize more than seven decades of Israeli Zionist settler-colonialism and the mass-slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza.[1] Following a wave of criticism, the SBL drafted a carefully articulated statement on 20th October that also failed to name and acknowledge atrocities of the Israeli government.[2] On the other hand, scholars and students of prominent universities around the world have been protesting the ongoing killing and starvation of Palestinians in Gaza. Meanwhile, some western churches seem either to have chosen to be silent or outspoken in support of the Zionist settler-colonial project. The latter have shown unequivocal allegiance by claiming theological and biblical reasoning for their position.

This article explores the militarization of sacred texts as a consequence, during the ongoing military campaign (as of June 2024), the Israeli government has militarized biblical texts to justify its war. It has done so as it has deployed its diverse and highly advanced arsenal against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Of particular concern is a new weapon empowered by artificial intelligence with destructive features and advanced military capabilities, named "the Gospel".[3] As yet no biblical scholars nor any theologians have addressed this issue given the fundamental significance of this word in the first four books of the New Testament and the ministry of Jesus. This article takes an empire

1 Society of Biblical Literature, 'SBL Council Statement on the Hamas Attacks in Israel,' https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/council/SBLSTATEMENT10.16-20.pdf. [accessed June 17, 2024].

2 Society of Biblical Literature, 'SBL Council Statement Concerning the Ongoing Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza and Israel', https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/council/SBLSTATEMENT10.16-20.pdf. [accessed June 17, 2024]

3 Harry Davies, Bethan McKernan, and Dan Sabbagh, '"The Gospel": How Israel Uses AI to Select Bombing Targets in Gaza' *The Guardian*, 1 December, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/01/the-gospel-how-israel-uses-ai-to-select-bombing-targets [accessed June 17, 2024]; Jonathan Fenton-Harvey, 'The Gospel: Israel's Controversial AI Used in the Gaza War', *New Arab*, 13 December, 2023, https://www.newarab.com/analysis/gospel-israels-controversial-ai-used-gaza-war [accessed June 17, 2024]; Geoff Brumfiel, 'Israel Is Using an AI System to Find Targets in Gaza. "Experts Say It's Just the Start"' *NPR*, 14 December, 2023, https://www.npr.org/2023/12/14/1218643254/israel-is-using-an-ai-system-to-find-targets-in-gaza-experts-say-its-just-the-st. [accessed June 17, 2024].

critical approach. To that end it presumes the research of scholars such as Richard Horsley, John Dominic Crossan, Warren Carter and Adam Winn in highlighting the anti/counter imperial elements of the New Testament.[4] This corpus of work can be extended to include the more recent studies of Christoph Heilig, Christina Petterson and Scot McKnight.[5] It is more than supported by Palestinian scholars and theologians, Mitri Raheb, Naim Ateek and Munther Isaac.[6] The Israeli war crimes in Gaza is the context of this article. The author is a Palestinian Christian who is native of Gaza and has family there. It has become an imperative to offer a critique of the militarization of sacred texts, especially in the light of naming an AI weapon 'the Gospel', in service of a settler-colonial project that can be seen as an act of genocide. It is recognized that the term 'genocide' is a legal and controversial one. It is nevertheless a claim that is being made by experts in the field. Amos Goldberg is an Israeli historian and a Holocaust and Genocide researcher at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The title of his article published in Hebrew on 17 April 2024 is: 'Yes, it is a Genocide: This is Exactly What Genocide Looks Like'.[7] According to Goldberg 'the result' of the rhetoric of Israeli officials that dehumanizes Palestinians, along with the destruction and death toll in Gaza is 'undoubtedly genocidal'.[8] Goldberg's conclusion sits in opposition to that of Omer Bartov, an Israeli-American Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Brown University, who argues that 'there is no proof of genocide currently taking

4 Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006); *Jesus and the Empire of God: Reading the Gospels in the Roman Empire* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2021); John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (HarperOne, 2009); Adam Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology Under Caesar: Jesus the Messiah and Roman Imperial Ideology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018).

5 Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Christoph Heilig, *The Apostle and the Empire: Paul's Implicit and Explicit Criticism of Rome* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2022); Christina Petterson, *Acts of Empire: The Acts of the Apostles and Imperial Ideology* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2020).

6 Naim Ateek, 'Foreword', in Naim Stifan Ateek, Cedar Duaybis, and Maurine Tobin, eds, *Challenging Empire: God, Faithfulness and Resistance*, (Jerusalem: Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, 2012), pp. 15–8; Mitri Raheb. *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014). Munther Isaac, 'Challenging the Empire: Theology of Justice in Palestine' in Rafiq Khoury and Rainer Zimmer-Winkel, eds, *Christian Theology in Palestinian Context* (Berlin: AphorismAVerlag, 2019), pp. 253–64.

7 Elias Feroz, 'Israeli Historian: This Is Exactly What Genocide Looks Like, interview with Amos Goldberg', *Jacobin*, 11 July 2024, https://jacobin.com/2024/07/amos-goldberg-genocide-gaza-israel [accessed August 17, 2024].

8 Ibid.

place in Gaza'.[9] Bartov, nevertheless, does acknowledge that the Israeli government is committing war crimes, and possibly crimes against humanity. It takes time to prove legally that an act of genocide is being committed. In the meantime, the United Nations Human Rights Council has published a draft report on 25th March, 2024 in which it declares that there are 'reasonable grounds to believe that the threshold indicating Israel's commission of genocide is met.'[10] This report unpacks a raft of evidence. It refers to Raphael Lemkin's definition of genocide, which also include acts of "ethnic cleansing" and "forcible transfer".[11] The question that now insinuates itself is one of which 'Gospel' do Palestinians think of when they hear this word. Is it bound to the kingdom of God or to genocide? The objective here is to show how the very concept of the gospel might have lost its clarity and become confusing among Palestinians.

2 Genocide in Context: The Zionist Settler Colonialism of Palestine

The United Nations passed the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide on 11th December, 1946. It declared genocide to be 'a crime under international law, contrary to the spirit and aims of the United Nations and condemned by the civilized world.'[12] The Convention sets legal grounds and criteria by which genocide is identified as 'acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.'[13] This convention came about in the immediate wake of World War II and in the shadow of the Holocaust. Lemkin, a Polish Jewish lawyer, who escaped Poland in the 1930s after the Nazi invasion, coined the term 'genocide' in 1944.[14] It was not long before the Palestinians, in turn, would become, in

9 Omer Bartov, 'What I Believe as an Historian of Genocide', in Lihin Ben Shitrit, ed, *The Gates of Gaza: Critical Voices from Israel on October 7 and the War with Hamas* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2024), pp. 139–42.

10 United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Antonym of Genocide: An Advanced Unedited Version', 25 March 2024, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session55/advance-versions/a-hrc-55-73-auv.pdf [accessed Sept 6, 2024]

11 Ibid.

12 United Nations, 'United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect', https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/1948-convention.shtml [accessed June 17, 2024].

13 Ibid.

14 Johann Justus Vasel, '"In the Beginning, There Was No Word"' *European Journal of International Law* 29:4 (November 2018): 1053–6, https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chy087 [accessed June 17, 2024].

1948 victims of an ethnic cleansing of nearly 750,000 of its people from their homeland at the hands of Zionist militias.[15] Palestinians still commemorate this war crime as Al-Nakba. The founding fathers of the Zionist movement have acknowledged that the intention to establish their settler-colonial project in Palestine required the forcible displacement, ethnic cleansing, and extermination of the natives of Palestine from their homeland. Joseph Weitz, head of the Jewish Colonization Department, argued that 'there is no room for both peoples, together in this country. The only solution is Palestine without Arabs. And there is no other way but to *transfer all of them: not one village, not one tribe should be left.*'[16] Writing in 1905 Israel Zangwill advised that the Zionist movement 'must be prepared either to *drive out by the sword* the tribes in possession as our forefathers did or to grapple with the problem of a large alien population.'[17] Zangwill envisaged a Joshua-style military conquest (see, Josh. 3:1–17) to 'drive out by the sword'[18] the Palestinians to fulfill the Zionist settler-colonial project.

The history of Zionism is complex. European nationalism and the rise of antisemitism were significant factors in the development of the Zionist movement and its settler-colonial project in Palestine decades before the Holocaust. The Nazi extermination of six million European Jews in the first-half of the 20th century accelerated the Zionist intention. Palestine was to become a safe haven for many European Jewish emigrants who had survived the Holocaust. In making this territory a home for European Jews the Palestinians became homeless.

Settler-colonialism and genocide can overlap. The former aims at creating a new society at the expense of the indigenous one and claim indigeneity to the land.[19] In the process it explicitly leads to the latter through the extermination, expulsion and inflicting serious damage to the indigenous population. The report of the UNRC determined that settler-colonialism 'is a dynamic, structural process and a confluence of acts aimed at displacing and eliminating

15 Nur Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* (London and New York: Zed Books Ltd., 2012); *Expulsion of the Palestinians* (Institution for Palestine Studies, 1992), Ilan Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (London, England: Oneworld, 2006).

16 Uri Davis, 'Palestine into Israel', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 3:1 (Autumn, 1973), 89.

17 Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: From Peace to War* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 180.

18 This statement accepts many interpretations, either to kill or remove, nonetheless, the intention to cause a serious harm to a society remains clear beyond doubt.

19 Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 47.

Indigenous groups, of which genocidal extermination/annihilation represents the peak.'[20] The practice of settler-colonialism attracts the characteristics of being genocidal. Patrick Wolfe has noted that not all settler colonial projects have committed genocides.[21] That does not invalidate Lorenzo Veracini's claim that the interest behind settler colonial projects is in 'turning indigenous peoples into refugees', while 'indigenis[ing] the settler'.[22] In other words, settler-colonial ideologies are established on the extermination, in full or part, of indigenous communities in order to allow space for settlers. Arnon Degani from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem likewise contends that the premise of settler colonialism is the elimination of the indigenous population, and that 'settler societies have violent, even genocidal, tendencies against natives.'[23]

The following statement reflect this genocidal intention. Theodor Herzl, the founding father of Zionism, acknowledged the necessity of displacing Palestinians Arabs across Arab countries in order to create a Jewish state in Palestine. Back in 1895 Herzl declared that

> [w]hen we occupy the land, we shall bring immediate benefits to the state that receives us. We must expropriate gently the private property of the estates assigned to us. We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries while denying it any employment in our own country. The property owners will come to our side. Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly.[24]

It is critical to note here as well that genocide is not an event, but rather a process.[25] Mass killing or physical destruction of a society of a group of people are not the only exclusive acts of genocide. Causing a serious physical and mental harm, inflecting 'conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical

20 UNHR Council, 'Antonym of Genocide'.

21 Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research* 8:4 (21 December 21, 2006): 387–409, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240 [accessed June 17, 2024].

22 Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, pp. 35–7.

23 Arnon Degani, 'From Republic to Empire: Israel and the Palestinians after 1948', in Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini, eds, *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2017), p. 354.

24 Theodor Herzl, *The Jews' State*, trans. Henk Overberg (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), p. 91.

25 Penny Green, Thomas MacManus, Alicia de la Cour Venning, eds, *Countdown to Annihilation: Genocide in Myanmar* (London: International Crime Initiative, 2015).

destruction in whole or in part' (Article II, C) are also genocidal. With that in mind, several elements in Herzl's statement classify as such. First, Herzl points to Zionist policies to deprive the Palestinians of their land, and hence their main social and economic power. In doing so, the Zionist movement intends to attempt systematically to render Palestinians destitute. Second, Herzl indisputably envisages the 'removal of the poor,' or rather those made poor by denying them employment, and enforce measures to 'spirit' the native Palestinians into neighbouring countries. Four decades before Herzl's remarks, the early Zionist slogan frequently used, 'a land without people, for a people without land', is credited to Zangwill, who made vivid reference to Palestine.[26] This particular slogan finds its origin in statements made by a Scottish clergyman, Alexander Keith in 1841, and a British politician and clergyman, Lord Shaftesbury, in 1854.[27] Their rhetoric recalls Isaiah 6:11 and applied to the Zionist cause that the land of Palestine had no people. Nonetheless, according to the fact-finding mission of the Zionist movement, 'the bride [Palestine] is beautiful, but she is married to another man [Palestinian Arabs].'[28]

Zionism has been genocidal since its inception. It began with the idea to find a safe haven for the European Jews fleeing from pogroms and antisemitism. Zionism was not always highly regarded by prominent Anglo-Jews[29] and Jewish communities in Germany.[30] The main problem here is that finding a safe haven came about by denying the Palestinian theirs. The oppression of the Palestinian people, more specifically in Gaza after 1967, has been widely ignored and went unseen. Since 2006, the Israeli government has imposed a blockade around the three hundred and sixty square kilometre coastal strip, limiting access to basic human needs. According to several media outlets and human rights organizations, the Israeli government 'calculated' the calories Gazans consume on a daily basis,[31] controlled the passage of people in and

26 See, Israel Zangwill, 'The Return to Palestine', New Liberal Review (December 1901), 615, cited in Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance, 1917–2017* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2020), p. 15.

27 Gershon Shafir, 'Theorizing Zionist Settler Colonialism in Palestine', in Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini, eds, *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism* (Oxford: Routledge, 2017), p. 339.

28 Avi Shlaim, 'The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World Since 1948', *The New York Times*, 14 November, 1999. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/99/11/14/reviews/991114.14bronjt.html [accessed June 17, 2024].

29 Illan Pappé, *Lobbying for Zionism on Both Sides of the Atlantic* (London: Oneworld, 2024).

30 Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 109.

31 See, for example, Amira Hass, '2,279 Calories per Person: How Israel Made Sure Gaza Didn't Starve', *Haaretz*, 17 October, 2012, https://www.haaretz.com/2012-10-17/ty-article

out, and determined other aspects of their lives.[32] These inhumane conditions compelled the Israeli sociologist, Baruch Kimmberling, to describe Gaza, even before 2006, as 'the world's largest concentration camp.'[33] Between 2008 and 2023, the Israeli government(s) have conducted at least four military operations in Gaza.[34] Thousands of Gazans were killed and injured, displaced, and lost their properties.

The ongoing genocide in Gaza is a new episode in the genocidal history of the Zionist settler-colonialism. The language of dehumanization, demonization, and degradation of Palestinians, incited by Israeli officials, has explicitly shown the genocidal intent of their settler-colonial of the Israeli government and Zionism.[35] A comprehensive report about the Israeli miliary campaign in Gaza published by the University Network for Human Rights offers an analytical study comprising hundred and five pages, documenting numerous genocidal statements by Israeli official, and proving that the Israeli military activities in Gaza since 7th October 2023 are genocidal.[36] The study was conducted by a collection of highly esteemed centers, including the International Human Rights Clinic, Boston University School of Law International Human Rights Clinic, Cornell Law School Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria Lowenstein Human Rights Project and Yale Law School. The International

/.premium/israels-gaza-quota-2-279-calories-a-day/0000017f-e0f2-d7b2-a77f-e3f75555 0000 [accessed June 17, 2024]; and see 'Putting Palestinians "On a Diet': Israel's Siege & Blockade of Gaza | IMEU', *Institute for Middle East Understanding*, 14 August, 2014, https://imeu.org/article/putting-palestinians-on-a-diet-israels-siege-blockade-of-gaza.; and 'Reader: "Food Consumption in the Gaza Strip – Red Lines"' *Gisha- Legal Center for Freedom of Movement*, 2012, https://www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/publications/redlines/redlines-position-paper-eng.pdf. [accessed June 17, 2024].

32 Amira Hass, 'Suffocation And Isolation: 17 Years of Israeli Blockade on Gaza', *Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor*, https://euromedmonitor.org/en/gaza [accessed 17 June, 2024].

33 Nur Masalha, 'Reading the Bible with the Eyes of the Canaanites: Neo-Zionism, Political Theology and the Land Traditions of the Bible (1967 to Gaza 2009)', *Holy Land Studies* 8: 1 (2009), 55–108, [accessed June 17, 2024].

34 Ibid.

35 Lee Mordechai, an Israeli historian and professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has documented numerous primary evidence of Israeli officials, journalists, and citizens who have used dehumanizing and genocidal language. See, Lee Mordechai, 'Bearing Witness to the Israel-Gaza War', *Academia.edu*, 18 June, 2024, https://www.academia.edu/112967602/Bearing_Witness_to_the_Israel_Gaza_War_updated_to_18_June_2024_. [accessed June 17, 2024].

36 University Network for Human Rights, 'Genocide In Gaza: Analysis of International Law and Its Application to Israel's Military Actions Since October 7, 2023', 15 May, 2024, https://www.humanrightsnetwork.org/genocide-in-gaza#:~:text=After%20reviewing%20the%20facts%20established,2023%2C%20violate%20the%20Genocide%20Convention. [accessed June 17, 2024].

Court of Justice in The Hague has ruled that it is 'plausible'[37] to conclude that the Israeli military activities in Gaza amount to genocide.

The opposite side to these determinations have been those positions that have justified the aggressive actions of the Israeli military. That number has included Christian lobbyist groups, such as Christians United for Israel (CUFI),[38] and assorted politicians in the United States. Tim Walberg, a congressman as well as an ordained pastor, a graduate of Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College, suggested that the Israeli military should bomb Gaza 'like Nagasaki and Hiroshima'.[39] Supporting Israel, even in its genocidal war, is a 'biblical admonition', for Mike Johnson, the Speaker of the House of Representatives.[40] Even evangelical pastors, who express support for Israel, interpret the genocide from a standpoint of biblical prophecies and end times.[41] For them, the thousands of Palestinians killed in Gaza are collateral damage, a justified sacrifice on the altar ushering the second coming of Christ. These examples show that the unconditional western Christian backing of the Israeli government(s), and its genocidal ideology and machine are informed by problematic biblical interpretations and theologies.

37 International Court for Justice, 'Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa V. Israel) Request for the Indication of Provisional Measures', 29 January, 2024, https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf [accessed June 17, 2024].

38 For example, the 'Impact' page of CUFI which has the headline "Impact Making Israel Stronger and Her People Safer". "Impact", Christian United For Israel, https://cufi.org/about/about-us/ [accessed 6 September, 2024]

39 *Al Jazeera*, 'Republican Congressman Suggests Nuking Gaza' 31 March, 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/3/31/republican-congressman-suggests-nuking-gaza. [accessed June 17, 2024].

40 Middle East Eye, '"It Is a Biblical Admonition to Stand with Israel" Says US House Speaker Mike Johnson' *YouTube*, 25 April, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-BFNrluvig. [accessed June 17, 2024].

41 See for example, Gary Hamrick's sermon on Ezekiel 38. Cornerstone Chapel, 'Israel, Hamas, and End Times | Ezekiel 38 | Gary Hamrick', *YouTube*, 15 October, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNs2tt7auQ4. [accessed June 17, 2024]. Also, see, 'Evangelical Attitudes toward Israel Research Study Evangelical Attitudes towards Israel and the Peace Process Sponsored by Chosen People Ministries and Author', *LifeWay Research*, December 2017, https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Evangelical-Attitudes-Toward-Israel-Research-Study-Report.pdf. [accessed June 17, 2024]. Netanyahu has repeatedly stated that evangelicals are Israel's "best friends". See, also Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman, 'Netanyahu Assures Evangelicals: Christians Are Israel's Best Friends' *The Jerusalem Post*, 3 September, 2023, https://www.jpost.com/christianworld/article-757395. [accessed June 17, 2024].

3 The Militarization of Sacred Texts: The Bible as the Software of Genocide

European imperial colonialism and Zionism have instrumentalized sacred religious texts to justify their domination, colonialism, and exploitation of the indigenous people. Postcolonial critics, such as R. S. Sugirtharajah argues that the Bible is a conquest book.[42] Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian theologian and Lutheran pastor, asserts that the Zionist Christian theology and usage of the biblical texts to justify the Zionist settler-colonial project is the 'software' – in other words, the ideology, which empowers the 'hardware', the military power of the settler-colonization of Palestine.[43] Zionists – Christians and Jews – invoke Jewish and Christian sacred texts to legitimatize the settler-colonialism of Palestine and the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

In his *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique*, Michael Prior demonstrates the weaponization of biblical texts in service of the Zionist military conquest of Palestine. Religious and secular Zionists claimed biblical right, or ethno-religious roots, to the land of Palestine. For some Zionists and their Christian allies, the Bible is their 'title deeds'[44] which gives legitimacy to their colonization. Narratives of promise, conquest, exile and return became critical. Texts, such as Gen. 12: 1–3, 7; 13:15; 17:8 are frequently referenced. The earlier statement by Shaftesbury that Palestine, as a land, 'was without an inhabitant' recalls Isa. 6:11.

It is evident that western Christian proto-Zionism shaped Jewish Zionism. Long before the creation of the Jewish Zionist movement, Keith Alexander and Lord Shaftesbury imagined the 'restoration' of the Jewish people to their 'promised land' as a pre-requisite of the second coming of Christ. Gershon Shafir, accurately observes that

> Long before vague Jewish messianic aspirations became a concrete Zionist project, it was a Christian venture. It emerged in the UK as Christian Evangelical Restorationism, a movement calling for and willing to sponsor the emigration of masses of Jews to Palestine as a precondition for the Second Coming of Christ while simultaneously seeking to convert them to Christianity.[45]

42 R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 32.

43 Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire*, p. 24.

44 Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, p. 198.

45 Shafir, "Theorizing Zionist Settler Colonialism in Palestine', 339.

In *The Zionist Bible* the Palestinian historian, Nur Masalha demonstrates how the Zionist movement, as an extension of European nationalism and settler-colonialism, and its Christian allies, have instrumentalized the Bible, biblical archaeology and theology in service of justifying the Zionist settler-colonialism. According to Masalha, Zionism 'constructed the themes of Zionist *militarized colonization* of Palestine by incorporating many of the epics and myths of the Hebrew Bible, especially the militarist land and conquest traditions.'[46] Themes, such as the conquering of Canaan and the annihilation of the Philistines, Canaanites, and Amalekites as the eternal rivals of the Hebrew people, are invoked by Zionists and Zionist Christians in order to legitimize theologically the extermination of the Palestinian people and the colonization of their land. This practice seemingly provides a divine mandate.

For Zionist Christians the genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza becomes apocalyptic; conceived in a particular way. Any major events surrounding the Zionist settler-colonial project is applied back from the Bible to the twentieth and twenty-first century. One of the more recent instances is from Roger van Oordt, Honorary Consul in the Netherlands for the State of Israel. Oordt was also the director of Christians for Israel Netherlands from 1992 until 2020. For Oordt, Hamas means chaos and violence. Based on his reading of Genesis 6, he argues that '[a]t that time the Lord repented that He had made man on the earth, which had become a place full of violence, full of *hamas*.'[47] What Oordt does not recognize is that Hamas is the acronym for *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya*, the Islamic Resistance Movement. For others, they interpret the current events based on their understandings of prophesies and dispensational views. They manifest themselves in making use of the Amalek narrative in Scripture, a particular way of viewing eschatology and the manner in which the reference to the name of an A1 military system as the 'Gospel' is accepted.

In his declaration of war against Gaza, the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, invoked the divine command to King Saul in 1 Sam. 15: 3 to destroy Amalek:[48] 'Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.' The narrative describes the ancient enmity between the

46 Nur Masalha, *The Zionist Bible: Biblical Precedent, Colonialism and the Erasure of Memory* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 42.

47 Roger van Oordt, 'Hamas Means Violence', *Christians for Israel International*, 13 December 2023, https://www.c4israel.org/news/blogs/hamas-means-violence/ [accessed Sept 6, 2024].

48 Middle East Eye, 'Netanyahu Faces Backlash for Evoking Biblical Amalek amid Heavy Civilian Casualties in Gaza' *YouTube*, 29 October, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMVs7akyMh0. [accessed June 17, 2024].

Hebrew people and the Amalekites. The first anointed king of ancient Israel receives his first divine task: the command is spoken through Samuel. It is to attack and destroy the Amalekites. Palestinians, in reference to this text, are viewed as the Amalekites. Netanyahu is effectively assuming the role of King Saul, anointed by God for such a military task.

This appeal to 1 Sam. 15 is not a recent development. Jewish and Christian Zionists[49] appeal to the narratives of ancient hostilities with the Canaanites, Philistines, and Amalekites are recurringly incited. In his article in *The New Yorker*, Jeffrey Goldberg investigates Zionist Jewish settlements in Hebron, the West Bank. He interviews leading figures among the settlers, and highlights their appeal to the Bible to rationalize their settler activities in the town. Regarding the Amalek narrative, Goldberg observes that 'some settler leaders see in the Palestinians the modern-day incarnation of the Amalekites.'[50] In his interview with Benzi Lieberman, the chairman of the council of settlements, Benzi stated that '[t]he Palestinians are Amalek!'[51] Masalha argues that 'key Israeli Ashkenazi rabbis and spiritual leaders, have appropriated the land narrative of the Hebrew Bible to compare modern Palestinian Muslims and Christians to the Canaanites, Philistines, *Amalekites* and Ishmaelites whose extermination or expulsion is predestined by a "divine design"'[52] In a similar fashion, Zionist Christian organizations such as the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem and the Gospel Coalition have published articles with similar primes,[53] describing Muslims, Arabs, and Palestinians as Amalekites. One such example comes from David Parsons, the vice president of the Christian Embassy who interprets 7th October as part of an eternal religious war and ancient rivalries derived from Cain's jealously of Abel, Ishmael and

49 Christian Zionism is not exclusive to a certain Christian tradition or a country. It is rather a movement that exists worldwide and among Christian traditions. Mitri Raheb defines Christian Zionism 'as a Christian lobby that supports the Jewish settler colonialism of Palestinian land by using biblical/theological constructs within a metanarrative while taking glocal considerations into account.' Mitri Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, the People, the Bible* (New York: Orbis, 2023), kindle.

50 Jeffrey Goldberg, 'Among the Settlers' *The New Yorker*, 24 May, 2004, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/05/31/among-the-settlers. [accessed June 17, 2024].

51 Ibid.

52 Masalha, *Zionist Bible*, 21–2.

53 It is worth mentioning the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem is a prominent Zionist Christian claims that its support of the Zionist settler-colonial project is biblical and theological, and even emphasize "*biblical roots* of Zionism." (italic original) Aron Engberg, *Walking on the Pages of the Word of God: Self, Land, and Text Among Evangelical Volunteers in Jerusalem* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020), p. 13.

Isaac, Esau and Jacob, and eventually Arab-Muslims and Israeli-Jews.[54] Peter Leithart, the president of the Theopolis Institute in Birmingham, Alabama, of the Gospel Coalition has claimed that Hamas used the tactics of Amalek in its attack. While distinguishing between Palestinians and Hamas, Leithart cautiously points out that 'to compare Hamas to Amalek isn't to justify or even suggest genocide.' Yet, he also concludes that Jesus 'will bring all his enemies under his feet, not just the Amalekites of Hamas but all who love violence and hate mercy.'[55]

There is a diversity of responses in the responses of Zionist Christians to 7th October and the situation in Gaza. That diversity ranges through fundamentalists to literalists to liberals. Across the spectrum the seem to agree on one thing, namely the Israeli Zionist claim of 'self-defense.'[56] Many literalists, who have historically viewed the establishment of the Zionist settler-colonialism as a divine miracle, interpret any major events from their viewpoint of biblical prophecies. Such an approach to biblical prophecies has led to the establishment of organizations such as Christians United For Israel, which plays a critical political role in supporting the Israeli government based on their theological convictions.[57] Another example is that of Greg Locke. Locke, an American evangelical pastor of Global Vision Bible Church in Tennessee. During his sermon on 8th October with the Israeli flag as background he called upon the Israeli government to destroy Gaza, and 'blow up' the Dome of the Rock, and to build the third temple: such action he interprets as a sign of end times in order to usher the second coming of Christ and the Kingdom of God.[58] In a similar fashion is a YouTube video by Greg Laurie, another evangelical pastor of a mega-church, watched by approximately one and a half million. Laurie declares that 'Jerusalem is the focal point of end times events.'[59] The Hamas

54 David Parsons, 'Israel, Hamas and the Spirit of Amalek', *International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem* 26 October, 2023, https://www.icej.org/blog/israel-hamas-and-the-spirit-of-amalek/. [accessed June 17, 2024].

55 Peter Leithart, 'Hamas Is Borrowing Tactics from the Amalekites', *The Gospel Coalition*, 13 October, 2023, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/hamas-tactics-amalekites/. [accessed June 17, 2024].

56 See for example, Russell Moore, 'American Christians Should Stand with Israel under Attack', *Christianity Today* 7 October, 2023, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2023/october-web-only/israel-hamas-middle-east-war-christians.html. [accessed June 17, 2024].

57 Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 167–71.

58 Pastor Greg Locke Sermons, 'Pray for Israel – Pastor Greg Locke', *YouTube*, 8 October, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-X7is5-Mrc. [accessed June 17, 2024].

59 Pastor Greg Laurie, 'What the Terror Attacks on Israel Mean for End Times Prophecy (with Greg Laurie)', *YouTube*, 9 October, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5495g3NT

attack is interpreted through a reading of Zechariah 12 and Ezekiel 37 and 48. Locke and Laurie are only a sample of outspoken Christian religious leaders who have made such clear statements – within a day or two of October 7th·.[60] They stand at a considerable remove from other Christian groups and leaders who have called for the end of violence and ceasefire.[61] The third example is the use of the name 'The Gospel" for an AI military system. According to a report published by United Nations experts, the Israeli military has used three AI systems such as Gospel, Lavender and Where's Daddy? in its attacks on civilians, infrastructures and residential building.[62] These systems have caused 'an unprecedented toll on the civilian population, housing, vital services and infrastructure.'[63] The +972 Magazine, an online magazine run by Palestinian and Israeli journalists, was arguably the first to report the Zionist use of the Gospel in Gaza. The system is named 'Habsora' in Hebrew and is translated into the Gospel in English. A former Israeli intelligence officer described the system as a 'mass assassination factory'.[64] The report has determined that the widespread use of the Gospel has been one of the reasons for 'extensive harm to civilian life in Gaza.'[65] Aviv Kochavi, the former head of the Israeli Defence Forces put the intelligence and military capability of the Gospel system into perspective: 'in the past we would produce 50 targets in Gaza per year. Now, this machine produces 100 targets in a single day, with 50% of them being

4VA [accessed June 17, 2024]; Ian M. Giatti and Christian Post Reporter, '"Fasten Your Seat Belt": Pastor Greg Laurie Talks Potential Fulfillment of Bible Prophecy in Israel-Hamas War' *The Christian Pos*t, 10 October, 2023, https://www.christianpost.com/news/greg-laurie-talks-potential-fulfillment-of-bible-prophecy-israel.html. [accessed June 17, 2024].

60 Michael Rowley, 'Evangelical Support for Israel Is Fueled By Apocalyptic Hopes', *Sojourners*, 9 November, 2023, https://sojo.net/articles/evangelical-support-israel-fueled-apocalyptic-hopes.

61 Chloë-Arizona Fodor, 'More than 200 Christian Leaders Sign Letter Calling for Cease-fire in Gaza', *National Catholic Reporter*, 24 July, 2024, https://www.ncronline.org/news/social-justice/more-200-christian-leaders-sign-letter-calling-cease-fire-gaza; Maya King, 'Black Pastors Pressure Biden for a Cease-Fire in Gaza', *The New York Times*, 28 January, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/28/us/politics/black-pastors-biden-gaza-israel.html.

62 United Nations Human Rights, 'Gaza: UN Experts Deplore Use of Purported AI to Commit "Domicide" in Gaza, Call for Reparative Approach to Rebuilding' 15 April, 2024, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/gaza-un-experts-deplore-use-purported-ai-commit-domicide-gaza-call. [accessed June 17, 2024].

63 Ibid.

64 Yuval Abraham, '"A Mass Assassination Factory": Inside Israel's Calculated Bombing of Gaza', *+972 Magazine*, 30 November, 2023, https://www.972mag.com/mass-assassination-factory-israel-calculated-bombing-gaza/. [accessed June 17, 2024].

65 Ibid.

attacked.'[66] Jennifer Cassidy of Oxford University describes the natural and ethical issues of 'the Gospel' as one of the Israeli military relying on algorithms in the war machine.[67]

Some Christians might not subscribe to Zionism and dispensationalism.[68] Yet, they use religious traditions and sacred texts to rationalize their support of the Zionist settler-colonialism. Russel Moore, chief editor of *Christianity Today*, does not believe that the post-1948 settler-colonialism project is a fulfilment of biblical prophecies and nonetheless argues 'American Christians should be united in support of Israel as it's under attack.'[69] Moore invokes Romans 13,[70] to argue for the Israeli government right to 'defend itself'. Moore's position illustrates how support for Zionism is not an exclusive phenomenon among Christian fundamentalist, but can also be found among progressives and liberals.

4 Which Gospel?

The word gospel, *injeel* in Arabic, is frequently used among lay Palestinian Christians as a reference to the entire Christian Scriptures. Even Palestinian Muslims use the world *injeel* in a general sense to describe the Christian sacred texts without necessarily recognizing that it encompasses the Hebrew Bible. This overarching reference to the gospel has sometimes been employed in the academy. Scot McKnight regards the gospel as a metanarrative of the divine intervention to bring about salvation, or, as he puts it, 'gospel of salvation.'[71] According to McKnight 'the Gospels are gospel because they see the Story of Israel completing itself in the Story of Jesus.'[72] Graham Stanton argued that the word carried three meanings for the early Christians – the 'oral proclamation', the 'written gospel', and the gospel, which refers to the Good News.[73]

66 Davies, et al., "'The Gospel'".

67 Jennifer Cassidy, 'Gospel Truth: Israel Turns AI into Civilian Killing Machine in Gaza' *TRT World*, https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/gospel-truth-israel-turns-ai-into-civilian-killing-machine-in-gaza-16250446. [accessed June 17, 2024].

68 For more about dispensationalism and Christian Zionism see for example, Stephen Sizer, *Zion's Christian Soldiers?* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2021); and, Donald Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

69 Moore, 'American Christians Should Stand with Israel under Attack'.

70 The same text was invoked in South Africa in support of apartheid.]

71 Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

72 Ibid.

73 Graham Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 12.

The use of the idiom 'the Gospel' for a destructive AI military system and machine is concerning, especially within Christian circles. For Palestinians, the singular meaning of 'the gospel' as the sacred text of good news is being challenged by a possible conflation with a military weapon that brings death and destruction. 'The gospel' becomes instead a representation of the imperial colonizing power, rather than the kingdom of God. The question arises: which 'Gospel' would Palestinians think of when they hear this word? Is it that of Kingdom or of the means of genocide?

The concept of 'the Gospel', *evangelion*, carries several connotations: it refers not only to the first four books of the New Testament, but also as the Good News of God's intervention to bring about liberation and redemption to humanity and creation. The gospel of Mark highlights the core meaning of the good news. It shows that the kingdom of God is the central message of the Jesus and his gospel. Some time ago now G. S. Beasley-Murray argued that there is a consensus among New Testament scholars on the authenticity and the centrality of Jesus' teaching on the kingdom and his entire ministry. He contends that

> one area in the testimony of the gospels to Jesus, the authenticity of which is agreed on by virtually all New Testament scholars – namely, the teaching of Jesus on the kingdom of God. It pervades the entire proclamation of Jesus recorded in the gospels and appears largely to have determined the course of his ministry.[74]

For Beasley-Murray, the proclamation of the Kingdom is the 'climax to his [Mark] prologue to the ministry of Jesus.'[75] For Mark, the good news (1:1) is all about Jesus' proclamation of the nearness of God's kingdom (1: 1, 14–15 NRSV), hence the gospel of Jesus is the gospel of the kingdom. It carries the fulfillment of the Hebrews' desire for restoration, liberation from imperial rule and oppression, echoing Isaiah 52: 7, 61, and 62.[76] George Eldon Ladd likewise argued that

> Jesus proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God, he did so against the background of Hebrew-Jewish thought, which viewed people living in a situation dominated by sin, evil, and death, from which they needed to be rescued. His proclamation of the Kingdom includes the hope, reaching back to the Old Testament prophets, that anticipates a new age

74 G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. x.
75 Ibid., 71.
76 See, Andrew Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom* (London: SPCK, 2016).

> in which all the evils of the present age will be purged by the act of God from human and earthly existence.[77]

Interpreting the kingdom as the central message of the gospel has been problematic, particularly in the Palestinian context. A futuristic interpretation of the kingdom has informed Zionist Christians and their view of the establishment of the Zionist settler-colonialism in Palestine as fulfillment of prophecies. Some scholars such as Albert Schweitzer and Johannes Weiss, have interpreted the kingdom as an apocalyptic event in the future. Schweitzer and Weiss might have not subscribed to or supported the settler-colonial project. Nonetheless, their futuristic view of the kingdom has informed the Zionist Christian ideology. Yaakov Ariel, argues that 'motivated by a literal reading of the Bible, and adhering to a Messianic faith, many Evangelical Christians view contemporary Jews as heirs to biblical Israel and the object of prophecies about a restored Davidic kingdom in the messianic age.'[78] Ladd has also noted that

> [i]n certain evangelical circles in America and Great Britain, a rather novel view of the Kingdom has had wide influence. Starting from the premise that all Old Testament prophecies to Israel must be fulfilled literally, dispensationalists have distinguished sharply between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. The latter is the rule of heaven (God) on earth and has primary reference to the earthly theocratic Kingdom promised to Old Testament Israel.[79]

This kind of interpretation of the Kingdom has become 'the software' of the Zionist settler-colonialism. It has done so even though the gospel of the kingdom is subversive and constitutes a critique of imperial violence and domination. Some scholars such as John Barclay,[80] Laura Robinson,[81] and Shane

77 George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 45–6.

78 Yaakov Ariel, 'Philosemites or Antisemites? Evangelical Christian Attitudes toward Jews, Judaism, and the State of Israel', *Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism* 20 (2002), 1–49.

79 Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, p.57.

80 John M. G. Barclay, 'Why the Roman Empire Was Insignificant to Paul', (Paper presented at *SBL Conference*, San Diego, 19 November, 2007), subsequently published in *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), pp. 363–88.

81 Laura Robinson, 'Hidden Transcripts? The Supposedly Self-Censoring Paul and Rome as Surveillance State in Modern Pauline Scholarship', *New Testament Studies* 67:1 (2021), 55–72, doi:10.1017/S0028688520000235

Wood,[82] contend that the Roman imperium had a marginal role on the New Testament authors. Nonetheless, Barclay acknowledges that Paul, for example, was not apolitical: 'Paul's gospel is deeply antithetical and confrontational; he knows of two kingdoms in sharp antithesis to one another.'[83] In a somewhat similar vein Stanton argues that

> although the imperial cult was not the source of early Christian use of the word group [gospel], it was the background against which distinctively Christian usage was forged and first heard. Christians claimed that God's once for all good news about Christ was to be differentiated from Providence's repeatable good news about the birth, accession, or return to health of Roman emperors.[84]

Stanton, indeed, differentiates between imperial gospels and other connotations of gospels used in the early Christian community. He states that the 'proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was heard against the backdrop of a rival set of "gospels" concerning the Roman emperors.'[85] In *Jesus and the Empire of God* Warren Carter applies intertextual methods to argue that the early Christian usage of the language is anti-imperial.

> The empire does not disappear from the Gospels just because an emperor or governor or soldier or tax is not mentioned. Rome-sanctioned, Jerusalem-based local leaders, pervasive sickness, food insecurity, occupied territory, language of sovereignty, fantasies of revenge, and visions of a new and just world all interact with Roman imperial structures and practices.[86]

In other words, the concept of gospel echoed differently within the first-century. For some, it was a proclamation of imperial role and dominance. For the early Christian community, it was counter-imperial, a mimicry of the Roman empire: Carter concludes that '[t]he rivalry between "the one Gospel of Jesus Christ" and "the gospels" of the Caesars encompasses far more than the use of the "gospel" word group.'[87] In essence, the gospel is at heart about the kingdom,

82 Shane Wood, *Alter-Imperial Paradigm: Empire Studies and the Book of Revelation* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).
83 Barclay, "Why the Roman Empire Was Insignificant to Paul."
84 Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel*, p. 2.
85 Ibid., p. 5.
86 Carter, *Jesus and the Empire of God*, p. 8.
87 Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel*, p. 10.

reign of God, and challenges the imperial gospel of Caesar. To state that God's kingdom is present, by necessity, meant a challenge to the kingship and sovereignty of imperial figures. In offering an alternative vision for a new world, Jesus 'was proclaiming that God was in the process of effecting the 'political revolution' that would overthrow the Roman imperial order in Palestine.'[88] With this understanding of the gospel of Jesus, without ignoring its political edge, the gospel envisions a world belonging to, and restored to, God, who is actively redeeming humanity and creation, rather than a system of imperial oppression.[89] The gospel of the kingdom is a threat to the empire, whereas the gospel of the empire and settler-colonial regimes is disturbing to the indigenous. Jesus is the embodiment of the gospel and the kingdom to bring healing and liberation (Lk. 4:16–19; Isa. 58 and 61). In the context of Israel's targeting of sites in Gaza the imperial 'Gospel' is materialized as a war machine to kill and destroy. 'The Gospel' has become the embodiment of genocide.

The Zionist Christians' interpretation of the kingdom and their support for the necessity of the Zionist settler-colonial project has meant the gospel has become disastrous news for Palestinians. In the words of *Kairos Palestine*, an ecumenical Palestinian Christian document written in 2009, '[t]he "good news" in the Gospel itself has become "a harbinger of death" for us'. This same document confesses that Jesus, in his proclamation of the kingdom,

> provoked a revolution in the life and faith of all humanity. He came with "a new teaching" (Mk. 1:27), casting a new light on the Old Testament, on the themes that relate to our Christian faith and our daily lives, themes such as the promises, the election, the people of God and the land. We believe that the Word of God is a living Word, casting a particular light on each period of history, manifesting to Christian believers what God is saying to us here and now. For this reason, it is unacceptable to transform the Word of God into letters of stone that pervert the love of God and His providence in the life of both peoples and individuals. This is precisely the error in fundamentalist Biblical interpretation that brings us death and destruction when the word of God is petrified and transmitted from generation to generation as a dead letter. This dead letter is used as a weapon in our present history in order to deprive us of our rights in our own land. (KP, 2.2.2)

88 Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, p. 103.

89 Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament* p. 141.

The *Kairos Palestine* document thus rejects and resists the militarization and weaponization of sacred texts to justify settler-colonial and imperial oppression. The mission of the church, as a prophetic agent of the gospel of the kingdom, is

> to proclaim the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice, peace and dignity. Our vocation as a living Church is to bear witness to the goodness of God and the dignity of human beings. We are called to pray and to make our voice heard when we announce a new society where human beings believe in their own dignity and the dignity of their adversaries[90]

According to the Palestinian liberation theologian, Naim Ateek,

> to be faithful to God is to resist the violence of Empire; and to resist the evil of injustice is to be faithful. For the follower of Jesus Christ, it is essential that resistance not use the tools and tactics of Empire but those that are in line with peaceful and nonviolent methods."[91]

For Palestinian theologians and clergy, the gospel of Jesus compels them to resist imperial violence with Jesus' way of the kingdom rather than replicating imperial tactics. Munther Isaac, argues that 'Jesus' way, his kingdom way, is radically different than that of the empire. It is not enough to criticize the empire. [The] best way to challenges the empire is to offer an alternative.'[92] Ateek's, Raheb's and Isaac's convictions find support in *Kairos Palestine*,[93] which encourages resistance to oppression with the logic of love.

5 Conclusion

I have argued that Zionism, as a settler-colonial ideology that stands for the elimination of the Palestinian people, is genocidal by nature. Genocide did not start in 2023, but in the imagination of proto-Zionists right at the very inception of the Zionist movement. Zionist Christians' reading of the prophecies to

90 Kairos Palestine, 'Kairos Document: A Moment of Truth a Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering (2009), https://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/about-kairos/kairos-palestine-document. [accessed June 17, 2024], 3.4.2

91 Ateek, 'Foreword', p. 17.

92 Isaac, 'Challenging the Empire', p. 262.

93 Kairos Palestine, 'Kairos Document', 4.2.5

be found in the Hebrew Bible and a futuristic interpretation of the Kingdom have become the ideological software of the Zionist settler-colonial project. Zionists – Christian and Jew – have also militarized sacred texts to justify the elimination and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people from their homeland. More worryingly has been the recent development of deploying an AI system and military hardware named 'the Gospel' as a critical weapon. In doing so, the Zionist settler-colonialism moved from using sacred text from software to hardware.

This essay has assumed that there are two gospels: there is an imperial gospel, which celebrates the dominance of emperors as a means of violence and military power. There is also the gospel of the kingdom, which challenges the imperial system of oppression. It is entirely understandable that Palestinians might have to think twice now when they hear the word 'gospel'. Is it the one which embodies liberation and life? Or, is the other that causes destruction and death?

The church, as the agent of the gospel, is called to be the prophetic voice to oppose and critique oppressive regimes and their abuse of sacred texts that legitimize their imperial ideology and tactics. The gospel of Jesus and the kingdom he proclaimed and embodied is at stake. The church cannot choose silence in the face of oppression and the abuse of the gospel. Dietrich Bonhoeffer confronted the church's silence: 'to delay or fail to make decisions may be more sinful than to make wrong decisions out of faith and love … Let us shake off our fear of this world – the cause of Christ is at stake; are we to be found sleeping?'[94]

94 Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance*, trans. Isabel Best (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2010), p. 159.